
THE TRAVEL ALMANAC

A conversation with Helmut Lang



By Paul Kominek
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Helmut Lang was one of the first personalities we featured in TTA in 2011 for our second issue. His transition from one of the world's most respected fashion designers to internationally renowned contemporary artist was still comparatively fresh at that point. He exited the brand, which to this day bears his name, in 2005. The interview coincided with one of his first major exhibitions, for which he shredded his 6000 piece clothing archive to turn it into sculptures. We printed pages from his expired passport that were part of his "Selective Memory series" and he talked about the origins of the project, finding a carton with letters, notes and postcards from friends. It felt like a welcome opportunity to revisit those ideas while we were contemplating the TTA postcard project, which he gracefully contributed to. He shares installation views of his upcoming MoCA Westport exhibition, some of his experiences during the Corona lockdown situation and his thoughts on quality communication.

Hi Helmut, where are you spending your time at the moment?

In Long Island, working in my studio.

How has the quarantine time treated you so far? Were there any unexpected aspects that this time of standstill has created for you?

It is not that difficult for me to be in isolation as working on art naturally requires it. I have been working on a commission and also another upcoming project, so I did not really have much of a standstill. I am naturally always observing and reflecting on the human condition, and I have been concerned since a long time with how we deal with our planet and the possible consequences.

Does that have an impact on your work too?

It has influenced a lot of my decisions and my work for quite some time. I do feel that the current situation is only the beginning of further urgencies to come.

Despite all the destructive aspects of the current crisis, do you think there will be positive outcomes of it too?

It better be a driving force for a sustainable future and respect for nature. Otherwise we are totally fucked.

Your new solo exhibition at MOCA Westport was about to open just before the lockdown was announced in NY. How did you experience that whole situation?

It was a state-wide order, and it affected two of my other current exhibitions as well. We expect it to open in early summer, and in the meantime, we work with social media like the rest of the world. Fortunately, I am currently part of an online exhibition of videos at vonammon.co.



For the aforementioned exhibition you designed a T-Shirt, your first piece of “clothing” in over 15 years. How did that come about?

I designed the graphics of a t-shirt for MoCA Westport’s merchandize in support of the institution. It was naturally easy for me.

Last time we interviewed you for TTA, we printed excerpts from your “Selective Memory series” that features letters, notes and postcards. How do you think has the significance of these tangible time stamps changed over the last decade? Is the project still ongoing?

I am continuing the SMS series indefinitely. Naturally, it has more digital entries than before. We came a long way from the telex times. Less boxes and more electronic files, which is somehow beneficial for progressing the project.

Do you remember ever sending postcards out yourself?

Unfortunately I don’t. I am not sure I ever actually sent one.





Then this is a premiere, how nice! Is there anything specific you are looking for to return to or being able to do again when the lockdown status will be lifted?

Seeing my friends again.

The feedback on this postcard project has been really overwhelming and quite emotional. People seem to really resonate with this type of “analogue” communication. Do you think the current situation is creating a need for a slower or more personal type of conversation?

Going forward there will be a change in pace. I had a rule all-along, which is to not reply to anyone for at least 24 hours, as I found that the hectic pace leads to less consideration and quality of communication. Just because we now use different mediums does not mean it can't be personal.

Portrait: Daniel Trese

Installation Views: Johnny Fogg

All images courtesy the artist and von ammon co.